

## Claims

What is claimed is:

1. An information distribution method for transmitting information to an information terminal connected via a network, comprising the steps of:

5 a user, who uses a network via a network provider under a condition of payment of a connection fee, transmitting a connection request that includes a user ID from an information terminal of said user to said network provider;

downloading a program from a server managed by said network provider, or by an entity that has a tie-up with said network provider;

10 transmitting, to said information terminal of said user, either a license key that is referred to when said downloaded program is activated or executed and that disables at least a part of the function of said program when said program matches a predetermined license condition, or information with which said license key can be generated;

again transmitting, subsequent to said preceding step, a connection request that  
15 includes said user ID from said information terminal of said user to said network provider;  
and

transmitting, to said information terminal of said user, either a new license key that is referred to when said downloaded program is activated or executed and that disables at least a part of the function of said program when said program matches another predetermined license condition, or information with which said new license key can be  
5 generated.

2. An information distribution method for transmitting information to an information terminal connected via a network, comprising the steps of:

a user, who obtains a user ID and a password and employs a network via a network provider under a condition of payment of a connection fee, activating a dialer at  
10 said information terminal, entering said user ID, said password and a telephone number for accessing said network provider, and transmitting a connection request to said network provider;

checking, upon the receipt of said connection request for said network provider, said user ID and said password that are included in said connection request;

15 transmitting, when the results obtained by the check are negative, a message used to notify said user of a connection failure;

assigning, when the results obtained by the check are affirmative, an IP address to said information terminal of said user, and registering a set consisting of said user ID and said correlated IP address;

transmitting said IP address assigned for said information terminal of said user;

- 5        transmitting a service menu screen, which is an initial screen, from said network provider to said information terminal of said user;

transmitting, when said user selects a file for downloading an article on said service menu, a request for a connection with a file server from said information terminal of said user to said network provider;

- 10       transmitting, when said file server receives said connection request, to said information terminal of said user a file downloading service menu or a menu that can be introduced into said file downloading service menu;

- transmitting, when said user selects the downloading of a desired file from said file downloading service menu, a file downloading request from said information terminal of  
15       said user to said network provider;

generating a license key, based on specified downloaded program information, that is associated with said desired file that is selected by said user and with said user ID that is

specified for said IP address included in said file downloading request and assigned to said information terminal of said user, and information that is associated with a license condition for a downloaded program;

referring to said license key when said downloaded program is activated or  
5 executed, and transmitting to said user, when said program matches said license condition, not only said license key but also a program for disabling at least a part of the function of said downloaded program;

disconnecting said information terminal of said user from said network provider;

activating a dialer, following the termination of said preceding step, in said  
10 information terminal of said user, entering said user ID, said password and said telephone number for accessing said network provider, and thereafter transmitting a connection request to said network provider;

checking again, when said network provider receives said connection request, said user ID and said password that are included in said connection request;

15 assigning an IP address, when the results obtained by the re-checking are affirmative, for said information terminal of said user and registering a set consisting of said user ID and said corresponding IP address;

transmitting said downloaded program specifying information from said  
information terminal of said user to said network provider;

generating a new license key based on said user ID and said received downloaded  
program specifying information; and

5 transmitting said new license key to said information terminal of said user.

3. An information distribution method for transmitting information to an  
information terminal connected via a network, comprising the steps of:

a user, who obtains a user ID and a password and employs a network via a  
network provider under a condition of payment of a connection fee, activating a dialer at  
10 said information terminal, entering said user ID, said password and a telephone number for  
accessing said network provider, and transmitting a connection request to said network  
provider;

checking, upon the receipt of said connection request for said network provider,  
said user ID and said password that are included in said connection request;

15 transmitting, when the results obtained by the check are negative, a message used  
to notify said user of a connection failure;

assigning, when the results obtained by the check are affirmative, an IP address to said information terminal of said user, and registering a set consisting of said user ID and said correlated IP address;

transmitting said IP address assigned for said information terminal of said user;

5 transmitting a service menu screen, which is an initial screen, from said network provider to said information terminal of said user;

transmitting, when said user selects a file for downloading an article on said service menu, a request for a connection with a file server from said information terminal of said user to said network provider;

10 transmitting, when said file server receives said connection request, to said information terminal of said user a file downloading service menu or a menu that can be introduced into said file downloading service menu;

transmitting, when said user selects the downloading of a desired file from said file downloading service menu, a file downloading request from said information terminal of  
15 said user to said network provider;

generating a license key, based on specified downloaded program information, that is associated with said desired file that is selected by said user and with said user ID that is

specified for said IP address included in said file downloading request and assigned to said information terminal of said user, and information that is associated with a license condition for a downloaded program;

registering said user ID and said downloaded program specifying information with  
5 which said user ID is correlated;

referring to said license key when said downloaded program is activated or executed, and transmitting to said user, when said program matches said license condition, not only said license key but also a program for disabling at least a part of the function of said downloaded program;

10 disconnecting said information terminal of said user from said network provider;

activating a dialer, following the termination of said preceding step, in said information terminal of said user, entering said user ID, said password and said telephone number for accessing said network provider, and thereafter transmitting a connection request to said network provider;

15 checking again, when said network provider receives said connection request, said user ID and said password that are included in said connection request;

assigning an IP address, when the results obtained by the re-checking are affirmative, for said information terminal of said user and registering a set consisting of said user ID and said corresponding IP address;

searching for said downloaded program specifying information that is registered  
5 while correlated with said user ID;

generating a new license key based on said user ID and said downloaded program specifying information that is found through said search; and

transmitting said new license key to said information terminal of said user.

4. An information distribution method for transmitting information to an  
10 information terminal connected via a network comprising the steps of:

transmitting a connection request, which includes a user ID, to a network provider from an information terminal of a user that holds either a license key, which is referred to when a program is activated or executed and which disables at least a part of the function of said program when said program matches a predetermined license condition, or  
15 information with which said license key can be generated; and



transmitting, from said network provider to said information terminal of said user,  
a new license key for said program or for information that can generate said new license  
key.

5. An information distribution system for, under the conditions imposed for  
5 the payment of a connection fee, transmitting information to an information terminal of a  
user who uses a network via a network provider comprising:

a PPP server for receiving, from said information terminal, a connection request,  
including a user ID, and for supporting a network connection;

a file server for receiving, from said information terminal, a request for the  
10 transmission of a downloaded program, and for transmitting to a network provider a  
connection request, which includes a user ID, from an information terminal of a user that  
holds either a license key, which is referred to when a program is activated or executed  
and which disables at least a part of the function of said program when said program  
matches a predetermined license condition, or information with which said license key can  
15 be generated; and

a subscription manager for, when said user is again connected to said PPP server,  
generating a new license key for said downloaded program.

6. A software product for transmitting information to an information terminal connected via a network comprising:

program code for, when a connection request, including a user ID, is transmitted to a network provider from an information terminal of a user who employs, via said  
5 network provider, a network under a condition that is dependent on the payment of a connection fee, and when said information terminal is connected to said network provider and a program is downloaded from said network provider, or from a server operated by an entity having a tie-up with said network provider, generating a license key, which is referred to when said downloaded program is activated or executed and which disables at  
10 least a part of the function of said downloaded program when said downloaded program matches a predetermined license condition, or information with which said license key can be generated; and

program code for generating a new license key for said downloaded program when said user is again connected to said network provider.

15 7. A program storage device readable by machine, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by the machine to perform a method for transmitting information to an information terminal connected via a network, said method comprising the steps of:

transmitting a connection request, which includes a user ID, to a network provider  
from an information terminal of a user that holds either a license key, which is referred to  
when a program is activated or executed and which disables at least a part of the function  
of said program when said program matches a predetermined license condition, or  
5 information with which said license key can be generated; and

transmitting, from said network provider to said information terminal of said user,  
a new license key for said program or for information that can generate said new license  
key.